

## S-p-r-e-a-d-i-n-g the word

**Concern, Inc.**, a nonprofit environmental organization, has published *A Report on the Conference on Nutrition and Social Policy*. The report discusses the American diet, its effect on health and the degree to which government might help consumers make dietary changes. Single copies cost \$1, 10 copies \$7, and 20 copies \$10. They may be ordered from Concern, Inc., 2233 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20007.

**Community Nutrition Institute (CNI)**, in cooperation with **Food Marketing Institute** and *Family Circle Magazine*, is again sponsoring a 2-day conference and workshop on "Nutrition and the American Food System, Part II" on June 1-2 at the Shoreham Americana Hotel in Washington, DC. Speakers include Donald Kennedy, Commissioner, **Food and Drug Administration**; Peter Bourne, Special Assistant to the President for Health Issues; Carol Foreman, Assistant Secretary for Food and Consumer Services, **Agriculture Dept.**; and Bob Bergland, Secretary, **Agriculture Dept.** Registration fee is \$90. A limited number of consumer scholarships are available. For more information write or call Janice Rodgers, Community Nutrition Institute, 1146 19th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036; telephone 202-833-1730.

For information on obtaining copies of last year's proceedings, get in touch with Janice Rodgers at above address.

**Consumer Federation of America's** Paul Douglas Consumer Research Center is sponsoring a second national consumer education conference June 5-7 at Mt. Vernon College in Washington, DC. Conference will focus on strategies and resources for developing effective grassroots consumer education and action programs. Registration fee, which includes 2 nights at the college and 6 meals, is \$45, based on double occupancy. To register and for more information write or call the Douglas Center, 1012 14th St., NW, Room 901, Washington, DC 20005; telephone 202-347-5813.

## "Catch-Up" Conference proceedings

Copies of **Office of Consumer Affairs'** (OCA) third annual Consumer Education "Catch-Up" Conference summary are available from Office of Consumer Affairs, 621 Reporters Bldg., Washington, DC 20201; Attention: Juanita Yates.

# consumer news

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & AGRICULTURE  
Office of Consumer Affairs

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## Sugar prices—going up again

Today's sugar prices are a far cry from the outrageous levels the consumer faced in 1974-75, but in case you haven't noticed, they are once again on the rise. This time it is not due to any natural disaster causing a shortage; in fact, it is happening when there is a worldwide sugar glut.

Over-planting generally occurs after prices reach record highs, causing oversupply and often record low prices. Unrefined sugar, which had sold for 60¢ a pound only a few years ago, sold for as little as 6¢ a pound last November.

American sugar producers, facing stiff competition from imported sugar on one front and improved low-cost corn sweeteners on the other, obtained relief from Congress in September 1977. This relief came in the form of price guarantees of 13½¢ a pound for raw sugar, but many producers say that's not enough.

While Congress was dealing with domestic sugar problems representatives of nearly 90 nations met in Geneva to hammer out an International Sugar Agreement (ISA) designed to stabilize world prices in a range which is both profitable to producers and fair to consumers.

The US is a member of the **International Sugar Organization**, but full participation must await Senate ratification of the ISA.

Several proposals for continued domestic support have emerged in recent months. Some of these proposals support ratification of the ISA and recommend domestic price support programs which are consistent with the provisions of ISA. Other proposals would either reject the ISA or recommend domestic provisions which are so incompatible with it as to be *de facto* rejection.

Whatever proposal prevails should stir considerable consumer interest since every one-cent increase in the price of a pound of sugar costs consumers between \$224 million and \$294 million. The present 13½¢ a pound support price will cost from \$840 million-\$1.10 billion according to **Office of Consumer Affairs** (OCA) estimates. That cost could go as high as \$2 billion per year if the most costly proposal is adopted.

CONSUMER NEWS has available a limited number of copies of *Sugar Issues—1978*, an OCA Consumer Issue Paper, which can be obtained by writing to CONSUMER NEWS, Office of Consumer Affairs, 621 Reporters Bldg., Washington, DC 20201.

## Tire study

The **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** (NHTSA) has announced that it has begun a safety related defect investigation involving Firestone 500 steel-belted radial tires. The safety agency said the investigation is the result of over 500 consumer reports of blowouts, out-of-round tires and tread separations in these tires. These include reports of 10 accidents involving 2 injuries.

## Beware of 'bargain cars'

Car shoppers should beware of "bargain cars" offered for super low prices this spring. A recent wire service story points out that these cars may be super trouble for consumers if they were soaked by water—especially salt water in winter storms. Salt water corrodes electrical systems and can turn these "bargains" into rusting hulks within months.

Only a few states, such as Pennsylvania, have laws requiring car titles to indicate that cars have been submerged or flooded, so consumers should check to see what information must be disclosed to car buyers in their states and learn how to identify flood damaged cars. The **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** told **CONSUMER NEWS** that it will soon be studying the problem of damage disclosure.

According to the Automobile Owners Action Council, buyers who suspect a vehicle might have been submerged should inspect the auto for such telltale signs as a high water line, dull and pitted paint, discoloration of fabrics, corrosion of copper and brass connections which results in a greenish color, and oxidizing of aluminum and chromium parts evidenced by a white coating.

## Recalls

• **WATER TOY—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)** and Wham-O Manufacturing Co., San Gabriel, CA announce the voluntary recall of Wham-O's "Water Wiggle" toy. About 2½ million of these toys have been sold throughout the US over the past 17 years. The toy consists of a 7-foot plastic hose attached to an aluminum waterjet nozzle which is covered by a bell-shaped plastic head and is designed to be attached to a garden hose. It costs about \$3.50. Water Wiggle was involved in 2 deaths (in 1975 and March 1978). What do do: Do not let children play with the toy (Wham-O requests retailers to remove the toy from their shelves), but return the Water Wiggle to the store where you bought it for a full refund or credit. For more information call Customer Service Dept., Wham-O Manufacturing Co., 835 East El Monte St., San Gabriel, CA 91778 (toll-free numbers 800-423-4592 or 3) or call CPSC's toll-free hotline at 800-638-2666; Maryland residents call 800-492-2937.

• **JACKS—National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)** has strongly urged 14 companies to voluntarily recall their hydraulic floor roller jacks because of a defect that could result in sudden

(Continued on page 4)

## Nutrition education bill introduced

Congressman Frederick W. Richmond, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations, and Nutrition, has introduced HR 11761, the National Consumer Nutrition Information Act of 1978. In introducing the bill Congressman Richmond noted that his Subcommittee's 1977 survey showed that 11 different Federal agencies, primarily in the **Agriculture** and **Health, Education and Welfare Depts (HEW)**, spend almost \$70 million a year "on a patchwork of more than 30 incoordinated and unfocused [nutrition education] programs." Despite all this activity, the Congressman added, in hearings held last September—in which more than 50 consumers and public interest advocates, health and nutrition professionals, communications experts, and community workers testified—his Subcommittee was told that serious nutrition education gaps exist in the US today.

In a marketplace that offers over 9,000 individual food products backed by an advertising budget of \$4 billion, "how can the American consumer make a wise choice . . . how can consumers rationally choose among such a bewildering variety unless they have the knowledge and skill to distinguish foods on their nutritional merits and not their advertised seductiveness," Congressman Richmond asked. He emphasized that the need for information is especially critical to children who watch 8,000 to 13,000 food and beverage commercials a year, according to various estimates.

Citing the **General Accounting Office (GAO)** report *Informing the Public about Nutrition* and its conclusion that the Federal Government's effort to coordinate its nutrition dissemination activities is minimal and the achievements of these activities inadequate, the New York Congressman asserted the need for what he termed "a new nutrition education" which must be:

- Diet and health oriented
- Based on the most current and accurate scientific knowledge
- Supported by the efforts of the public and private sectors
- Designed to reach all consumers in ways and places that are relevant to their varying lifestyles and needs
- Comprehensive enough to enable consumers to make wise choices in a free marketplace

HR 11761 would establish a National Nutrition Education Council in Agriculture Dept. to plan a policy that would coordinate Federal nutrition education activities. The council would include representatives from the Federal agencies with nutrition education and research responsibilities, as well as nutrition educators and scientists, consumers, farmers, food processors and marketers, and voluntary groups. After 2 years the council would report its findings to Congress. The Agriculture Secretary would also establish a departmental nutrition education policy.

Also required by the bill would be research and demonstration projects in methods of delivering nutrition information at the community level, graphic labeling of foods for nutrient content, and the use of television public service announcements.

Another event of interest to consumers concerned about nutrition is the release of another GAO report, *Federal Human Nutrition Research Needs a Coordinated Approach To Advance Nutrition Knowledge*. GAO says that though several departments and agencies of the Federal Government spend about 3% of the \$3 billion spent on all agricultural and health research (\$73 million to \$117 million) on human nutrition research there is limited comprehensive consolidated information on these activities. The GAO report recommends steps to overcome this problem and discusses specific targets for nutrition research.

## Immunization campaign is working

**Health, Education and Welfare Dept. (HEW)** says its campaign to immunize millions of US children against 7 preventable diseases—polio, measles, rubella, mumps, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus—is beginning to show results.

Last year 4½ million children were vaccinated against measles in publicly funded programs—1.6 million more than were vaccinated in 1976. Immunizations for the other diseases also went up last year as follows (again in publicly funded programs, the only ones for which there are complete figures):

- By 34.8% against mumps, from 1.2 million in 1976 to 1.6 million in 1977.
- By 18.9% against rubella, from 2.5 million in 1976 to 3 million in 1977.
- Vaccine doses administered against diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus rose by 12.1%, from 8 million to 9 million.
- Doses of oral vaccine against polio rose by 6.3%, from 7.8 million in 1976 to 8.3 million in 1977.

As a result, HEW says the incidence of such diseases is showing dramatic declines. For example, during the first 12 weeks of 1978, compared with the same period in 1977, measles cases dropped by 65%, from 16,701 to 6,064, close to the lowest incidence on record.

In spite of the progress being made to reach its stated goals (by the fall of 1979) (1) to immunize at least 90% of all children against the 7 diseases and (2) to establish a permanent system which will assure that the 3 million babies born each year receive proper immunization at the appropriate time, HEW is still worried about the gap between immunization levels in affluent communities and in low-income areas and the problem of immunizing preschoolers. (School age children are much better protected, thanks to the efforts of many states in enforcing their school entry immunization laws.)

HEW notes that while television, radio, newspapers and magazines have given good coverage to the agency's effort to make the public more aware of the need for protecting children against preventable diseases, many parents do not realize the diseases remain a potentially serious threat today. HEW says, "Since the risks are real, and since effective vaccines are available at little or no cost, there is no excuse for allowing a single child in this country to remain unprotected against these diseases."

## Getting credit

**Justice Dept.** has announced the establishment of a special unit to enforce the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA), which prohibits discrimination in lending practices.

The unit, consisting of 12 lawyers, will investigate complaints and take legal action against financial and retail institutions that discriminate against credit applicants on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age or receipt of public assistance.

Under ECOA the Attorney General is authorized to bring suit when he has reason to believe that creditors are violating the law.

Justice said that citizen complaints are a key basis for investigations, and that persons who believe they have been discriminated against in denial of credit, granting of credit on different terms, redlining, (the refusal to make loans or the application of different conditions in making loans to persons living in a particular geographic area) or other practices should contact the Housing and Credit Section, Civil Rights Division, Justice Dept., Washington, DC 20530; telephone 202-739-4123.

## Tell it like it is

Warner Lambert, makers of Listerine mouthwash, must now tell consumers what their product does not do.

The **Supreme Court** has let stand a US Court of Appeals ruling requiring \$10.2 million in Listerine ads to carry the statement, "Listerine will not help prevent colds or sore throats or lessen their severity." The order upheld is the first to require an advertiser to run ads retracting past claims.

This corrective advertising results from a **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** finding that the makers of the mouthwash had made false claims about Listerine's power to prevent colds. The Commission said that comparable relief could be obtained from salt water.

## Chain saw safety

The **Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)** has reported that last year almost 40,000 people were treated in emergency rooms for injuries involving chainsaws, and that the Commission will work with the Chain Saw Manufacturers Association to develop voluntary—rather than mandatory—safety standards in an effort to reduce the risk of injury.

Many chain saw injuries are caused by "kickback," the sudden unexpected movement of the blade toward the user's body. Other frequent injuries include lacerations to the hands, lower arms and legs, the face, head and neck.

CPSC will continue to compile statistics on chain saw injuries, and may decide to develop a mandatory safety standard if the voluntary plan is not adequate to deal with the problem.

## Help for household movers

**Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)** has expanded its toll-free telephone hotline service—**800-424-9312**—which was originally set up early in 1974 to help truckers find fuel supplies during the nation's severe energy shortage. Now that consumers have learned about the number, ICC has broadened its reach from the original office of information to household goods and other service branches. ICC says that each month it receives about 3,000 complaints, comments or questions about transportation at its headquarters or through its 78 regional and field offices. Persons calling the hotline will reach a new Consumer Complaint Center, which will attempt "to handle complaints or inquiries on the spot without any need for additional calls."

## Recall

(Continued from page 2)

failure causing serious injuries to mechanics or car owners. Three of these companies have agreed to voluntary recalls of over 100,000 jacks. They are Hollywood Accessories (Model 646); G. I. Joes, Inc. (Model J-204 and Model W-1629; and Midland International Corp. (Medallion Model 62-219).

Other companies presently selling identical or similar jacks include: Allison Corp. (Model 9829); K-P Manufacturing Co. (Model 2-2150); Chief-tain Automotive Products (Model GL-08); Midland International Corp. (Medallion Model 62-218); On-Guard Corp. of America Co., Inc. (Model 6300); Foxcraft-Philmont Division, Gulf and Western Manufacturing Co. (Foxcraft Model HFJ-30); Stem Distributing Co. (Model A3000); Automotive Trading, Ltd. (Model GE-3000); and Watervliet Tool Co. (Model H-1). Later models of these manufacturers are not involved in this investigation.

Also under investigation are models marketed by Vornado, Zayre Corp., Schuman Auto Supply, Fred Meyer Co., and other manufacturers, importers or direct buy retailers not yet named. NHTSA has already received reports of 6 minor injuries allegedly due to failure of this type of jack. What to do: *Stop using it*, and report any problem to NHTSA, 400 7th St., SW, Washington, DC 20590, or call NHTSA's toll-free Auto Safety Hotline at 800-424-9393; Washington, DC metropolitan area residents call 426-0123.

## Consumer participation in metric programs

Now that the Senate has confirmed 13 nominees to the US Metric Board—4 more still have to be named and/or confirmed—the Board can begin carrying out the provisions of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 to . . . "coordinate the voluntary conversion to the metric system."

One of the Board's functions is to "publicize, in an appropriate manner, proposed programs and to provide an opportunity for interested groups or individuals to submit comments on such programs . . ."

In line with publicizing metric programs, Lee Richardson, Acting Director of the **Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA)**, wrote in a letter to the Chairman of the Metric Board:

I believe the work of the US Metric Board will be critical in assisting the United States' transition to metric, and the Board's decisions will have far-ranging impact on the marketplace and on the consumer's ability to perform in that marketplace. I hope the Board will establish early in its deliberations a policy of outreach to obtain consumer comment on its policies and decisions. As has been reiterated time and again, metric conversion will not succeed without consumer awareness and understanding.

In addition, Dr. Richardson asked that the Board give early notices of the time and places of its upcoming meetings "so that consumers might have the opportunity to learn first hand of the workings of the Board."

In the meantime, the following publications should be useful to those who find the concept of metrication confusing:

- *Metrication and the Consumer: Avoiding Deception in the Marketplace* costs 40¢ and is available from the American National Metric Council, 1625 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

- *A Metric Reference for Consumers* costs 30¢ and is available by writing to the Metric Council, address above.

- *What about Metric?* was prepared by **Commerce Dept.'s National Bureau of Standards** and may be purchased for 35¢ from Consumer Information Center, Dept 047F, Pueblo, CO 81009.

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